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in parliament for the attainment of economical reform, the friends of that principle will multiply every day; and sooner or later, the ministry will find it impossible to hold out against the public voice."

While this apathy remains, abuses must continue. Administrations, or even parliaments will not reform themselves, unless the expression of the public will is explicitly defined, and the demand on them is loud and strong. Attempts at reformation must be abortive, unless the people do their parts. We do not recommend intemperate brawling; by violence a good cause is injured, and the cause of reform is too justly founded to need such means; but we wish to see the people more generally throw aside the present childish and imbecile dread of reform, and assert their claims with the calm dignity of men who know and duly appreciate their rights.

K.

Practical Sermons on Interesting Subjects; by the Rev. Thomas E. Higginson. Sermon 2d. 8vo. p.p. 26. Belfast, Smyth and Lyons, 1809.

THIS is the second of a series of sermons, intended to be published. On the first we have already commented, in the manner which we thought its merits deserved.*

Of the present we shall observe, in the first place, that it corresponds more with the professed intention of the author than the former; that intention being, as far as we can judge from his own words, "to deliver a system of preceptive Christianity, suitable to all sects." Its text is, "Search the Scriptures;" and its substance consists of arguments, enforcing the necessity of referring to the Bible for the principles of faith and practice, instead of depending on mere human compositions. It may therefore be looked upon as a preface or introduction to those that are to follow, and therefore, in our opinion, ought to have had the first place. Nor can we see why the reverend author chose to commence his series by a subject totally irrelevant to his main design, unless it has been sent forward as a forlorn hope, or the first detachment of grenadiers to a breach, to bear the brunt of the at-

tack, and waste the enemies' ammunition and fire, so that the main body may effect its design unmolested. He will be much mistaken, however, if he expects to find us asleep on our post. Or, he might have sent it out as a proof of his abilities, as musicians usually give a flourish on their instruments before they commence their sonata. If such was his intention, he should have known that such preludes are always in the key note.

The necessity of studying the Scriptures for Christian knowledge, instead of relying on subsequent comments and explanations, is in general well stated in the following paragraph:

"We have reason to esteem it abundant cause for gratitude, that God has in every revolution of time, and as circumstances required, raised up in his church wise and faithful ministers, so replenished with the truth of his doctrine, and so adorned with innocence of life, as to be fully fitted to enforce and explain his sacred oracles; and both by word and deed faithfully to serve him in their several offices, to the glory of his name and the edifying of his people. But the enemy of souls on his side has not been idle: ever on the watch to counteract the designs of God's spiritual government, and to introduce his tares among the excellent seed. It is to this that we have to ascribe such frequent divisions in the church of Christ; that we see men otherwise calculated for extensive usefulness, induced to become leaders of separation, and to introduce opinions which have no foundation in the divine testimony, as well as dangerous and destructive to God's people: and that many, imposed on by their insinuations, have been led to depart from the Christian ordinances, from the long established and well authenticated means of grace, and to adopt maxims and sentiments quite novel in the church of Christ. Hence it is that we see the most useful truths perverted; and doctrines, that in the beautiful simplicity of Scripture, sweetly harmonize together, and which, by their beneficial influence, tend to form the complete christian character, in humble dependence upon God, and active benevolence towards man: we see them, through the perversion of human subtlety, made apparently to

* See vol. 2, page 218.

clash with each other, and to sanction conclusions tending to introduce divisions among men, and to countenance impiety towards God. Nor can we be fortified against this evil but by making the fountain of truth the only ground of our faith, and by a minute and careful attention to it, until we become thoroughly acquainted with the information it conveys, the doctrines it inculcates, the morality it enforces, and the motives which it holds forth to influence our conduct, and incline our determination, until we be able "rightly to divide the word of God," to observe the connection between *principles* and *practice*, and to trace, in the inspired writings themselves, the beautiful harmony that subsists between the works of faith, the patience of hope, and the labour of love." p. 41.

And the bad effects of the contrary practice are also pointed out very clearly as follows:

"But how contrary to this is the general practice? It is a question if many have ever read the Bible in their life. They begin, where they should end, with human compositions. They gather sentences of Scripture from human compilations. They are, perhaps, piously inclined in this exercise, and save themselves, as they think, much trouble by it, but it is at the hazard of accumulating much error. "What is the chaff to the wheat, saith the Lord?" It is almost impossible to have an unprejudiced mind in this way of acting. It is almost impossible to escape from becoming perfect bigots, and is the readiest way to arrive at that reprobate mind, that undiscerning and injudicious state of intellect, as perhaps to think ourselves *serving God* when hurling anathemas against his children." p. 43.

Indeed the necessity of such practice cannot be too strongly impressed, and the futility of all other means of acquiring such knowledge may be best judged of by considering, that while the book itself which contains the principles of our faith and practice, is but a single volume of small size, the comments on it are so numerous and bulky, that were it possible to have them all brought together, they would surpass the largest library ever collected; and were they to meet a similar fate with those of the celebrated

Alexandrian library, the infidels would have required no other fire for their baths to the present day.

Mr. H. gives three motives to enforce this practice. The first, that *the Scriptures are the word of God*; the second, that *they only can be esteemed perfect truth*; and the third, that *they are the most sublime and useful of all studies*. The second of these is included in the first, and the author seems to think it sufficient to illustrate each, without attempting any demonstration. If by *principle* he means *axiom*, he is right. But in supposing the first of them self-evident, he differs from most others who have treated the subject. Volumes have been written to prove this proposition, which is indeed the great point at issue between the believers in natural and revealed religion. The third motive is more fully dwelt upon; yet the remarks on it terminate in a singular manner: "We may say of it, as the queen of Sheba said of the wisdom of Solomon, *the half is not told*." The sermon terminates with an exhortation to those intrusted with the sacred office to this study; an exhortation which we should have thought unnecessary, were there not too many proofs of the contrary daily presented to our view.

With respect to the style of this sermon, we confess ourselves disinclined to approve of that of familiar colloquial conversation, usual with itinerant secretaries, and which the author seems to incline to. The style should be suitable to the subject. If this be sublime, that should not be mean or feeble. Even in the pulpit a certain dignity of character should be preserved by the orator. In writings intended for the closet, as printed sermons must be, a deviation from it is inexcusable. The commencement of the sermon now before us is a striking instance of the fault to which we allude.

"Our Lord Jesus Christ, when on earth, spake as 'never man spoke,' and with a force of persuasion peculiar to himself. The surrounding scene gave him lessons for our instruction, and every passing occurrence furnished him with a subject for the benefit of his auditory. The birds of the air, and the beasts of the field, became under his divine direction preachers

of dependence upon God. The cruelty of Herod, and the destruction occasioned by the fall of the tower in Siloam, drew forth a call to repentance, whilst apposite passages of history, interspersed with instructive parables, afforded him occasion to evince the evil of sensuality, and to exhibit the necessity of continual watchfulness and circumspection.

"May we also be permitted to imitate so divine a preacher? to take advantage, in like manner, of passing occurrences, in order to excite your attention to things of infinite moment? Yes, the high authority to which I have adverted, will sufficiently plead my excuse for introducing the present discourse with a short, but interesting narrative taken from fact.

"You all know the metropolis of the Empire, and have heard of the celebrated observatory of Greenwich. A traveller here met with, not long since, one of the aged pensioners, his head silvered over with venerable hairs, and his front indented by many a furrow. He was observing through a telescope the buildings of the capital, when the stranger thus accosted him, "Pray, what great structure is that which rises so supereminent above all the rest, and makes so conspicuous an appearance?" "O! Sir, that is St. Paul's," immediately answered the old man. "And, pray," said the inquirer, "who is St. Paul, to whose memory they have erected so costly an edifice?" "St. Paul!" said the old man, apparently surprised at the unexpectedness of the question, "St. Paul! I always heard that that building was St. Paul's, but I really don't know who he was." "Why, here is a very extraordinary thing," said the stranger. "Were a monument erected in your neighbourhood to a Pitt, or a Nelson, you would immediately know who, and what he was, and what he had done to occasion his being held in such high respect; yet here is one of the most stupendous monuments in the world, which has stood for ages the admiration of every traveller, one too immediately under your notice, and you do not know the man to whose honour it was erected, or why he was held in such high estimation." If any

thing can add to our astonishment at this recital, it is this, the poor old man had a bible, he had a bible, and yet he was both old and ignorant."

Every reader must see the little similarity there exists between the story of the Greenwich pensioner and the parables of Christ. Such anecdotes as are useful in elucidating any passage, seem to be much better thrown into the form of a note, as has been done by this writer himself in another part of the same sermon. From the last sentence of the passage now quoted it would appear that the bible was a remedy not only against ignorance but old age—"the poor old man had a bible, he had a bible, and yet he was both *old and ignorant*."

We were sorry to be obliged to note a few faults in language in the first of these sermons; and are more so in finding the number rather augmented. The word character is always personified, as;

"Yet such are the characters *who* engross most of our attention." p. 38.

"Any extraordinary character *who* rises on the theatre of this transitory scene." p. 37.

We have heard of the scene of a theatre; but what is meant by *the theatre of a scene* we leave the author to explain.

In the following passage the sense is obscured by the wrong collocation of a circumstance; the latter part also is defective through the want of a verb.

"But the enemy of souls *on his side* has not been idle: (*he is*) ever on the watch to counteract the design of God's spiritual government, and to introduce his tares among the excellent seed." p. 41.

Let the following also be analyzed. We shall quote it more fully than may appear requisite, to avoid the suspicion of any unfairness in stating the defect.

"I am not condemning in the gross all human testimony as you will observe from what I have said in this very section, for how shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? The very establishment of a gospel ministry, may be considered

not merely as an allowance, but as a command of God, to attend to their evidence respecting it." p. 45.

To what does the pronoun *it* refer? Not to the gospel ministry, for that is pluralized by the preceding pronoun *their*, not to *God*, and obviously not to his *command*: it is in fact a substitute without a principal.

As we have entered our protest against an affectation of familiarity displaying itself by the introduction of anecdote, so we would also against the same fault showing itself in the use of low expressions, which, however they may be tolerated in common conversation, are totally inadmissible in good writing. For instance; "it lies by them as a neglected book, while *trash of every kind* forces itself on our notice," p. 36.

"Who enters into the ministry to *make the most of time*," p. 54.

We shall conclude with the following hint, in hopes that it may be

taken as it is given, and thus prevent the painful necessity of similar comments on the subsequent numbers of this series.

In a sermon when preached, many inaccuracies are overlooked, many faults forgiven; it is considered, particularly with respect to style and language, as the effusion of the moment, and therefore unsusceptible of the high polish, and correctness of compositions composed and revised in the closet. But in printed sermons in which the public has a right to expect these qualities, the omission of them must be attributed either to incapacity or carelessness; faults of equally great magnitude in one who presents himself uninvited before this tribunal of final jurisdiction. And Mr. H. may be assured that his sermons would have been thus scrutinized and censured, even though he was not so fortunate as to have a friend *to tell him openly of their faults*. Q.

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